

CHAPTER 32-12.1 GOVERNMENTAL LIABILITY

32-12.1-01. Legislative intent. This chapter creates additional powers and optional and alternative methods for the single and specific purpose of enabling political subdivisions to pay and to compromise claims and judgments, to issue bonds to fund and satisfy the same, to levy taxes in amounts necessary for such purposes without respect to limitations otherwise existing, and to compromise judgments and make periodic payments on such compromised amount.

32-12.1-02. Definitions. As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

1. "Claim" means any claim permitted by this chapter brought against a political subdivision for an injury caused by a political subdivision or an employee of the political subdivision acting within the scope of the employee's employment or office.
2. "Commissioner" means the insurance commissioner.
3. "Employee" means any officer, employee, board member, volunteer, or servant of a political subdivision, whether elected or appointed and whether or not compensated. The term does not include an independent contractor, or any person performing tasks the details of which the political subdivision has no right to control.
4. "Injury" means personal injury, death, or property damage.
5. "Personal injury" includes bodily injury, mental injury, sickness, or disease sustained by a person, and injury to a person's rights or reputation.
6. "Political subdivision":
 - a. Includes all counties, townships, park districts, school districts, cities, public nonprofit corporations, and any other units of local government which are created either by statute or by the Constitution of North Dakota for local government or other public purposes, except no new units of government or political subdivisions are created or authorized by this chapter.
 - b. Does not include nor may it be construed to mean either the state of North Dakota or any of the several agencies, boards, bureaus, commissions, councils, courts, departments, institutions, or offices of government which collectively constitute the government of the state of North Dakota.
7. "Property damage" includes injury to or destruction of tangible or intangible property.
8. "Public nonprofit corporation" means a nonprofit corporation that performs a governmental function and is funded, entirely or partly, by the state, a city, county, park district, school district, or township.

32-12.1-03. Liability of political subdivisions - Limitations.

1. Each political subdivision is liable for money damages for injuries when the injuries are proximately caused by the negligence or wrongful act or omission of any employee acting within the scope of the employee's employment or office under circumstances where the employee would be personally liable to a claimant in accordance with the laws of this state, or injury caused from some condition or use of tangible property, real or personal, under circumstances where the political subdivision, if a private person, would be liable to the claimant. The enactment of a law, rule, regulation, or ordinance to protect any person's health, safety, property, or welfare does not create a duty of care on the part of the political subdivision, its employees, or its agents, if that duty would not otherwise exist.

2. The liability of political subdivisions under this chapter is limited to a total of two hundred fifty thousand dollars per person and five hundred thousand dollars for injury to three or more persons during any single occurrence regardless of the number of political subdivisions, or employees of such political subdivisions, which are involved in that occurrence. A political subdivision may not be held liable, or be ordered to indemnify an employee held liable, for punitive or exemplary damages.
3. A political subdivision or a political subdivision employee may not be held liable under this chapter for any of the following claims:
 - a. A claim based upon an act or omission of a political subdivision employee exercising due care in the execution of a valid or invalid statute or regulation.
 - b. The decision to undertake or the refusal to undertake any legislative or quasi-legislative act, including the decision to adopt or the refusal to adopt any statute, charter, ordinance, order, regulation, resolution, or resolve.
 - c. The decision to undertake or the refusal to undertake any judicial or quasi-judicial act, including the decision to grant, to grant with conditions, to refuse to grant, or to revoke any license, permit, order, or other administrative approval or denial.
 - d. The decision to perform or the refusal to exercise or perform a discretionary function or duty, whether or not such discretion is abused and whether or not the statute, charter, ordinance, order, resolution, regulation, or resolve under which the discretionary function or duty is performed is valid or invalid.
 - e. Injury directly or indirectly caused by a person who is not employed by the political subdivision.
 - f. A claim relating to injury directly or indirectly caused by the performance or nonperformance of a public duty, including:
 - (1) Inspecting, licensing, approving, mitigating, warning, abating, or failing to so act regarding compliance with or the violation of any law, rule, regulation, or any condition affecting health or safety.
 - (2) Enforcing, monitoring, or failing to enforce or monitor conditions of sentencing, parole, probation, or juvenile supervision.
 - (3) Providing or failing to provide law enforcement services in the ordinary course of a political subdivision's law enforcement operations.
 - (4) Providing or failing to provide fire protection services in the ordinary course of a political subdivision's fire protection operations.
 - g. "Public duty" does not include action of the political subdivision or a political subdivision employee under circumstances in which a special relationship can be established between the political subdivision and the injured party. A special relationship is demonstrated if all of the following elements exist:
 - (1) Direct contact between the political subdivision and the injured party.
 - (2) An assumption by the political subdivision, by means of promises or actions, of an affirmative duty to act on behalf of the party who allegedly was injured.
 - (3) Knowledge on the part of the political subdivision that inaction of the political subdivision could lead to harm.

- (4) The injured party's justifiable reliance on the political subdivision's affirmative undertaking, occurrence of the injury while the injured party was under the direct control of the political subdivision, or the political subdivision action increases the risk of harm.
4. This chapter does not obligate political subdivisions for an amount that is more than the limitations upon liability imposed by this chapter. Subject to this chapter, any payments to persons constitute payment in full of any compromised claim or judgment or any final judgment under this chapter.
5. Notwithstanding this chapter, a political subdivision or its insurance carrier is not liable for any claim arising out of the conduct of a ridesharing arrangement, as defined in section 8-02-07.
6. A political subdivision is not liable for any claim based on an act or omission in the designation, repair, operation, or maintenance of a minimum maintenance road if that designation has been made in accordance with sections 24-07-35 through 24-07-37 and if the road has been maintained at a level to serve occasional and intermittent traffic.

32-12.1-04. Political subdivision to be named in action - Personal liability of employees - Indemnification of claims and final judgments.

1. An action for injuries proximately caused by the alleged negligence, wrongful act, or omission of an employee of a political subdivision occurring within the scope of the employee's employment or office shall be brought against the political subdivision. If there is any question concerning whether the alleged negligence, wrongful act, or omission occurred within the scope of employment or office of the employee, the employee may be named as a party to the action and the issue may be tried separately. A political subdivision must defend the employee until the court determines the employee was acting outside the scope of the employee's employment or office.
2. An employee shall not be personally liable for money damages for injuries when the injuries are proximately caused by the negligence, wrongful act, or omission of the employee acting within the scope of the employee's employment or office.
3. No employee may be held liable in the employee's personal capacity for acts or omissions of the employee occurring within the scope of the employee's employment unless the acts or omissions constitute reckless or grossly negligent conduct, or willful or wanton misconduct. An employee may be personally liable for money damages for injuries when the injuries are proximately caused by the negligence, wrongful act, or omission of the employee acting outside the scope of the employee's employment or office. The plaintiff in such an action bears the burden of proof to show by clear and convincing evidence that the employee was either acting outside the scope of the employee's employment or office or the employee was acting within the scope of employment in a reckless, grossly negligent, willful, or wanton manner. Employees may be liable for punitive or exemplary damages. The extent to which an employee may be personally liable pursuant to this section and whether the employee was acting within the scope of employment or office shall be specifically stated in a final judgment.
4. A political subdivision shall indemnify and save harmless an employee for any claim, whether groundless or not, and final judgment for any act or omission occurring within the scope of employment or office of the employee. The indemnification shall be made in the manner provided by this chapter and shall be subject to the limitations herein.

32-12.1-05. Liability insurance policy coverage. An insurance policy or insurance contract purchased by a political subdivision or a government self-insurance pool in which a political subdivision participates pursuant to this chapter may provide coverage for the types of liabilities established by this chapter and may provide such additional coverage as the governing body of the political subdivision determines to be appropriate. The insurer may not assert the defense of governmental immunity, but this chapter confers no right upon a claimant to sue an insurer directly. If a dispute exists concerning the amount or nature of the required insurance coverage, the dispute must be tried separately. The insurance coverage authorized by this chapter may be in addition to any insurance coverage purchased by a political subdivision pursuant to any other provision of law and if premium savings will result therefrom, any insurance policy purchased pursuant to this chapter or any other provision of law may be written for a period which exceeds one year.

32-12.1-06. Statement to commissioner. Repealed by S.L. 1987, ch. 407, § 2.

32-12.1-07. Authorized insurance.

1. The insurance authorized by this chapter may be provided by:
 - a. Self-insurance, which may be funded by appropriations to establish or maintain reserves for self-insurance purposes.
 - b. An insurance company authorized to do business in this state which the commissioner has determined to be responsible and financially sound, considering the extent of the coverage required.
 - c. Any combination of the methods of obtaining insurance authorized in subdivisions a and b.
2. This chapter does not prohibit a political subdivision from uniting with other political subdivisions in order to purchase liability insurance or to self-insure.

32-12.1-08. Political subdivision insurance reserve fund - Tax levy.

1. A political subdivision, other than a school district or park district, may establish and maintain an insurance reserve fund for insurance purposes, and all political subdivisions including school districts and park districts may include in the annual tax levy of the political subdivision such amounts as are determined by the governing body to be necessary for the purposes and uses of the insurance reserve fund. The tax levy authorized by this section may not exceed the limitation in section 57-15-28.1, except a levy by a school district or park district must be within the general fund levy authority of the school district or park district. If a political subdivision has no annual tax levy, the political subdivision may appropriate from any unexpended balance in its general fund such amounts as the governing body of the political subdivision determines necessary for the purposes and uses of the insurance reserve fund.
2. Except in the case of a school district or park district, the fund established pursuant to this section must be kept separate and apart from all other funds and may be used only for the payment of claims against the political subdivision which have been settled or compromised, judgments rendered against the political subdivision for injuries arising out of risks established by this chapter, or costs incurred in the defense of claims. Payments by a school district or park district for the same purposes must be made out of the political subdivision's general fund.

32-12.1-09. Duties of insurance commissioner. The commissioner shall be responsible for determining the specifications for the liability insurance covering the areas of risk as specified in this chapter. The commissioner shall require the insurance company to guarantee that its policy provides minimum coverages pursuant to required specifications. The

commissioner may certify to political subdivisions obtaining liability insurance from an insurance company whether such company is responsible and financially sound considering the extent of coverage which the insurance company is offering.

32-12.1-10. Statute of limitations. An action brought under this chapter must be commenced within three years after the claim for relief has accrued.

32-12.1-11. Judgment against political subdivision - Additional tax levy. If a final judgment is obtained against any political subdivision except a school district, the governing body of the political subdivision may by resolution provide for the levy and collection of an annual tax upon all the taxable property within the political subdivision for the payment of such judgment. The amount levied under this section for the payment of a judgment against a political subdivision shall not exceed the limitation set forth in section 57-15-28.1.

32-12.1-12. Compromise of judgments against political subdivisions - Tax levy to pay reduced judgment - Tax limitations not applicable. If a final judgment for the payment of money is entered against a political subdivision and the political subdivision is compelled to pay the judgment by a tax upon all the taxable property in the political subdivision, the governing body, by a resolution adopted by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of its members, may enter into an agreement in the name of the political subdivision with the holder of the judgment for a compromise by a payment of a sum less than the amount of the judgment. If the amount agreed to be paid in compromise of the judgment is at least twenty-five percent less than the unpaid amount of the judgment, the governing body may provide for and levy the tax necessary to pay the reduced judgment in accordance with the terms of the compromise agreement. Limitations upon taxes which may be levied by political subdivisions for the payment of judgments shall not be applicable to taxes levied under this section.

32-12.1-13. Bonds may be issued to pay compromised amount - Regulations governing. The compromised amount of a judgment agreed upon may be made payable in stated annual installments over a period not exceeding twenty-five years and at an annual rate of interest of not more than five percent. The governing body, by a resolution adopted by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of its members, may issue bonds payable serially and maturing annually, as the parties may agree, and in the amounts of the annual installments and interest determined by the compromise, in satisfaction and discharge of the judgment. Bonds issued under this section shall be delivered to the judgment creditor upon the release of the judgment and in consideration of the full satisfaction thereof. The bonds shall be executed in the name of the political subdivision by the executive officer and the auditor or fiscal officer thereof. Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, the bonds shall be in the form prescribed for political subdivision bonds which are payable from the levy of a general tax. Prior to the delivery of the bonds to the judgment creditor, the bonds shall be certified and recorded by the auditor or fiscal officer in the manner provided by the laws of this state for the certification and recording of general obligation bonds of political subdivisions.

32-12.1-14. Levy of tax to pay principal and interest of bonds - Duty of county auditor. At the time of the issuance of bonds to be used to compromise a judgment, and before the delivery thereof, the governing body of the political subdivision, by a recorded resolution, shall levy a direct, annual, and irrevocable tax sufficient in amount to pay the principal and interest of the bonds as they severally mature. A copy of the resolution shall be certified to and filed with the county auditor. The county auditor thereupon and annually thereafter shall spread the annual tax provided in the resolution upon the tax list and shall deliver the list to the county treasurer, who shall collect the tax in the manner provided for the collection of other taxes.

32-12.1-15. State agencies authorized to purchase insurance and participate in government self-insurance pools - Approval by insurance commissioner. Repealed by S.L. 1995, ch. 329, § 14.